

The Finished Work of Jesus Christ: Sin, Forgiveness, Death, and Victory Through the Cross

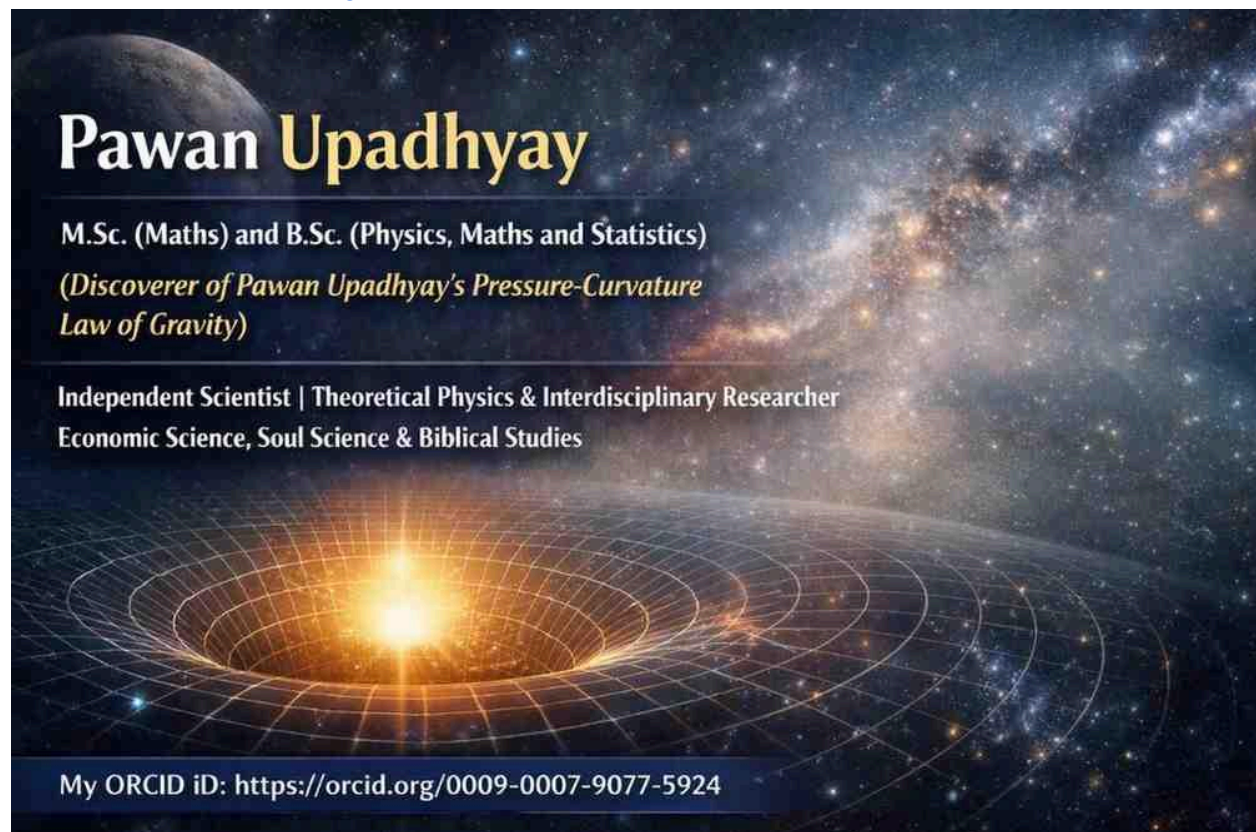
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Abstract

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ stands at the center of Christian theology. His declaration, “**It is finished**” (John 19:30), provides a theological key for understanding the meaning of His death. This paper examines the relationship between Christ's finished work, His bearing of human sin,

divine forgiveness, the defeat of sin and death, the destruction of the works of the devil, and the significance of His Resurrection. The study argues that the Cross should not be understood merely as the tragic death of an innocent person. Within the New Testament witness, Christ's death is presented as a sacrificial and redemptive act in which He bears sins, gives Himself for humanity, and accomplishes the work entrusted to Him. His forgiveness toward His persecutors demonstrates the character of His victory, while the Resurrection reveals that death does not have the final word. The response of the Roman centurion further illustrates the paradox of the Cross: the apparent defeat of Jesus becomes a moment of recognition of His identity and innocence. The paper concludes that the Cross and Resurrection together constitute the central movement of Christian proclamation: Christ bears sin, offers forgiveness, confronts the powers of evil and death, and opens the way to reconciliation and new life.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, Cross, crucifixion, "It is finished," sin, forgiveness, atonement, death, Resurrection, Satan, victory, redemption

1. Introduction

The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross is one of the central events of the New Testament and the foundation of Christian reflection on salvation. The crucifixion is presented simultaneously as an event of suffering, sacrifice, obedience, forgiveness, judgment, redemption, and victory.

The Gospel of John records Jesus' final declaration before His death:

"It is finished."

— John 19:30

These words deserve particular attention because Jesus does not describe His life as simply ending. The expression points toward the completion of the work He came to accomplish.

The Cross therefore raises several interconnected theological questions:

1. What was finished through Christ's death?
2. In what sense did Christ bear human sin?
3. How is forgiveness related to the Cross?
4. In what sense can Christ's death be understood as a victory over sin and death?
5. What is the relationship between Christ's victory and the defeat of Satan?
6. Why does the Resurrection remain essential to understanding the Cross?

This paper examines these questions through a study of relevant New Testament passages.

2. The Meaning of “It Is Finished”

John 19:30 records:

“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

The Greek expression translated **“It is finished”** is *tetelestai* (τετέλεσται), from the verb *teleō*, associated with completion, fulfillment, or bringing something to its intended conclusion.

The immediate context indicates that Jesus' death is not portrayed simply as an accidental termination of His ministry. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of having been sent by the Father and of accomplishing the work given to Him.

For example, Jesus says:

“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”
— John 17:4

Consequently, John 19:30 can be read within the broader theme of **mission accomplished**.

The statement does not mean that God's activity in history had ended. The Resurrection, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the proclamation of the Gospel were still to occur. Rather, the declaration concerns the completion of the work associated with Jesus' earthly mission and His sacrificial death.

Thus:

“It is finished” does not mean “everything is over.”

It means that the decisive work entrusted to Christ had reached its appointed completion.

3. Christ Bore Human Sin

One of the clearest New Testament statements concerning Christ's death appears in 1 Peter:

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.”
— 1 Peter 2:24

This passage contains two connected ideas.

First, Christ **bore sins**.

Second, the purpose of this work is transformation:

“that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.”

The Cross therefore cannot be reduced to the idea that Christ merely suffered on behalf of humanity. The New Testament connects His death with a change in humanity's relationship to sin.

Isaiah's language concerning the suffering servant provides an important background to this theological understanding:

“The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

— Isaiah 53:6

The New Testament repeatedly applies this sacrificial imagery to Jesus.

Paul writes:

“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.”

— 1 Corinthians 15:3

The phrase **“for our sins”** establishes a direct relationship between Christ's death and the problem of human sin.

4. Christ as the Lamb of God

John the Baptist introduces Jesus with the words:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

— John 1:29

The imagery of the Lamb places Jesus within the sacrificial vocabulary of Scripture.

The important theological claim is that Christ does not merely teach people how to deal with sin. His own person and death become central to the New Testament understanding of God's response to sin.

The language of sacrifice appears explicitly in several passages.

Hebrews states:

“He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

— Hebrews 9:26

The same chapter states:

“Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...”

— Hebrews 9:28

The repeated emphasis on **“once”** highlights the finality and uniqueness attributed to Christ's sacrificial offering.

5. Sin, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

The Cross must also be considered in relation to forgiveness.

Jesus' words from the Cross in Luke are particularly significant:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

— Luke 23:34

Here, Jesus responds to His crucifixion not with a curse but with a prayer for forgiveness.

This does not mean that sin is treated as insignificant. Rather, the Cross presents forgiveness as God's redemptive response to sin.

Paul describes the result of Christ's work in terms of reconciliation:

“While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”

— Romans 5:10

And again:

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.”

— 2 Corinthians 5:19

Thus, the theological movement can be described as:

Sin → separation → Christ's sacrificial death → forgiveness → reconciliation → new life.

Forgiveness is therefore not merely the cancellation of an abstract debt. It is associated with restoration of relationship with God.

6. The Defeat of Sin

It is important to distinguish **forgiveness of sin** from **the defeat of sin**.

Forgiveness concerns the sinner's restored relationship with God.

The defeat of sin concerns the breaking of sin's dominion and its ultimate consequences.

Paul describes believers as having died and risen with Christ:

“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”

— Romans 6:6

The Cross therefore has an ethical and transformative dimension.

Christ's work is not merely intended to remove guilt while leaving humanity unchanged.

The purpose is expressed in 1 Peter 2:24:

“that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.”

The defeat of sin therefore has both a decisive and an ongoing dimension.

Christ's death is presented as the decisive redemptive act, while believers are subsequently called to live in freedom from sin's dominion.

7. Christ's Victory Over Death

Sin and death are closely connected in Paul's theological argument.

Romans 6:23 states:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

If Christ's work addresses sin, it must also be understood in relation to death.

This is why the Resurrection is indispensable.

Paul writes:

“Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”
— 1 Corinthians 15:20

The Resurrection demonstrates that death does not have ultimate authority over Christ.

The Christian proclamation is therefore not simply:

Christ died.

It is:

Christ died and Christ was raised.

The Cross and Resurrection must be held together.

The Cross reveals sacrificial death.

The Resurrection reveals victory over death.

8. Christ's Victory Over Satan and the Powers of Evil

The New Testament also connects Christ's death with the defeat of the devil.

Hebrews 2:14 states:

“Through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”

This is one of the most striking paradoxes in Christian theology.

Christ conquers **through death**.

The instrument that appears to represent defeat becomes the means through which victory is accomplished.

Colossians presents another powerful image:

“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”
— Colossians 2:15

The precise interpretation of these “rulers and authorities” has been discussed throughout Christian theological history, but the basic New Testament imagery is clear: Christ's work is associated with triumph over hostile spiritual powers.

First John likewise states:

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

— 1 John 3:8

Therefore, Christ's victory can be understood as encompassing:

sin, death, and the powers of evil.

9. The Paradox of the Cross

The Cross appears, from a human perspective, to be a defeat.

Jesus is:

- rejected,
- condemned,
- mocked,
- beaten,
- crucified,
- and killed.

Yet the New Testament interprets this event in radically different terms.

Paul writes:

“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

— 1 Corinthians 1:18

The paradox is central:

The condemned One becomes the Redeemer.

The suffering One becomes the victorious One.

The crucified One becomes the risen Lord.

The apparent defeat becomes the means of victory.

This paradox prevents the Cross from being interpreted merely as an example of unjust suffering. Within the Christian Gospel, suffering and victory are mysteriously joined together.

10. The Roman Centurion at the Cross

The Roman centurion provides an important narrative response to Jesus' death.

Matthew records:

“When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”

— Matthew 27:54

Mark records:

“Truly this man was the Son of God!”

— Mark 15:39

Luke records:

“Certainly this man was innocent!”

— Luke 23:47

These accounts differ in wording, but each presents the centurion's response as significant.

The man being crucified is recognized in some extraordinary way precisely at the moment of His death.

This reinforces the paradox of the Cross.

Jesus appears powerless, yet His death provokes recognition.

11. A Necessary Textual Clarification Concerning the Centurion

It is sometimes said that the Roman soldier bowed his head before Jesus' dead body.

The Gospel texts should be distinguished carefully here.

John 19:30 says:

“He bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

The subject is Jesus.

The Gospel does not state that the Roman centurion bowed his head before Jesus' body.

Instead, the Synoptic Gospels describe the centurion witnessing Jesus' death and making a confession concerning Him.

This distinction is important in theological research because interpretation should remain connected to what the biblical text actually records.

The theological significance of the centurion does not depend upon adding a gesture that the Gospel does not explicitly describe.

His **confession** is itself significant.

12. “It Is Finished” and the Defeat of Sin

The declaration “**It is finished**” can therefore be understood within the larger New Testament theology of redemption.

Christ's work includes:

1. His obedience to the Father.
2. His sacrificial death.
3. His bearing of human sin.
4. His prayer for forgiveness.
5. His confrontation with the powers of evil.
6. His entry into death.
7. His Resurrection.
8. The opening of reconciliation and new life.

Consequently, the phrase “**It is finished**” can be connected with the completion of the decisive sacrificial work of Christ.

The Cross does not mean that sin has ceased to exist in human history.

Rather, it means that the decisive redemptive act has been accomplished and that sin's ultimate dominion has been challenged and defeated through Christ's work.

13. The Cross and the Power of Forgiveness

The forgiveness displayed by Jesus is not weakness.

It is an expression of His obedience and love.

The Cross demonstrates that Christ does not answer human sin by reproducing the same pattern of sin.

He is hated, yet He loves.

He is wounded, yet He prays.

He is condemned, yet He offers forgiveness.

He is killed, yet He gives life.

This creates a profound theological principle:

Christ's victory over sin does not occur by becoming sinful; it occurs through perfect obedience to God.

The Cross therefore reveals the power of forgiveness as a response to sin.

Forgiveness does not deny justice or pretend that evil has not occurred. Rather, in the New Testament's redemptive framework, forgiveness becomes part of God's work of reconciliation.

14. The Cross and Resurrection as One Redemptive Movement

The Cross should never be isolated from the Resurrection.

If the story ended with Jesus' death, Christianity would have no resurrection proclamation.

Paul emphasizes this strongly:

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”

— 1 Corinthians 15:17

This statement demonstrates how closely Paul connects the Resurrection with the question of sin.

The Christian proclamation therefore moves through several stages:

The Incarnation

The Word becomes flesh.

The Ministry

Jesus announces the Kingdom of God and calls humanity to repentance and faith.

The Cross

Christ gives Himself and bears sin.

The Death

Christ enters fully into human mortality.

The Resurrection

Christ rises from the dead.

The Proclamation

The Gospel of forgiveness and new life is announced to the nations.

Thus, **“It is finished”** marks the completion of the sacrificial work, while the Resurrection reveals the victorious result.

15. A Theological Model of Christ's Victory

The biblical material can be summarized through the following model:

Human Sin

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Christ Bears Sin

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Christ's Sacrificial Death

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Forgiveness and Reconciliation

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Defeat of the Power of Sin and Death

↓

Victory Over the Powers of Evil

↓

Resurrection

↓

New Life in Christ

This model should not be interpreted as a claim that every Christian theological tradition explains atonement in exactly the same way.

Christian theology has developed several complementary ways of describing Christ's saving work, including sacrificial, substitutionary, reconciliatory, and victory-oriented (*Christus Victor*) interpretations.

Nevertheless, the New Testament consistently presents Christ's death and Resurrection as central to salvation.

16. Theological Synthesis

The central themes examined in this paper can now be brought together.

Christ bore sin

“He himself bore our sins in his body...”
— 1 Peter 2:24

Christ offered Himself

“He has appeared ... to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”
— Hebrews 9:26

Christ prayed for forgiveness

“Father, forgive them...”
— Luke 23:34

Christ completed His work

“It is finished.”
— John 19:30

Christ confronted the power of death

“Through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”
— Hebrews 2:14

Christ rose

“Christ has been raised from the dead.”
— 1 Corinthians 15:20

These passages together provide the theological foundation for understanding the Cross not merely as an execution but as a redemptive event.

17. Conclusion

The Cross of Jesus Christ represents the meeting point of **sin, sacrifice, forgiveness, death, and divine victory**.

Jesus Christ bore human sins in His body.

He willingly entered into suffering.

He prayed for forgiveness while being crucified.

He declared:

“It is finished.”

His death completed the decisive sacrificial work of His earthly mission.

Yet His death was not the final word.

The Resurrection revealed that death could not ultimately hold Him.

The New Testament therefore presents Christ as victorious over the powers associated with sin and death and as the One through whom forgiveness and reconciliation with God are offered.

The Roman centurion's response provides a striking narrative witness to the paradox. At the moment when Jesus appears defeated, the centurion recognizes something extraordinary about Him.

The Cross therefore reverses ordinary human expectations.

What appears to be defeat becomes the context of victory.

What appears to be weakness reveals divine power.

What appears to be the end becomes the beginning of resurrection life.

The theological movement can therefore be summarized:

Christ bore sin.

Christ offered forgiveness.

Christ confronted evil.

Christ entered death.

Christ conquered death.

Christ rose again.

And at the center stands the declaration:

“It is finished.”

The Cross declares the completion of Christ's redemptive work; the Resurrection declares the victory of the crucified and risen Christ.

For Christian faith, this is the heart of the Gospel: **sin does not have the final word, death does not have the final word, and the Cross is not the story of Christ's defeat. The Cross leads to Resurrection, and the Resurrection reveals Christ's victory.**

Selected Biblical References

Old Testament

- Isaiah 53:4–12 — The suffering servant bearing the iniquity of many.
- Psalm 22 — The suffering and vindication imagery traditionally associated with the Messiah.

Gospels

- John 1:29 — Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away sin.
- John 10:17–18 — Jesus speaks of laying down His life voluntarily.
- John 11:25–26 — Jesus as the resurrection and the life.
- John 17:4 — Jesus speaks of accomplishing the work given by the Father.
- John 19:16–30 — The crucifixion and “It is finished.”
- Luke 23:34 — Jesus' prayer for forgiveness.
- Luke 23:46–47 — Jesus' death and the centurion's response.
- Matthew 27:54 — The centurion's confession.
- Mark 15:39 — The centurion's confession.

Pauline Epistles

- Romans 3:21–26 — God's righteousness and redemption in Christ.
- Romans 5:6–11 — Reconciliation through Christ's death.
- Romans 6:1–14 — Death to sin and new life in Christ.
- 1 Corinthians 1:18 — The Cross as the power of God.
- 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 — Christ died for sins and was raised.
- 1 Corinthians 15:17–20 — The importance of the Resurrection.
- 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 — Reconciliation through Christ.

General Epistles and Hebrews

- Hebrews 2:14–18 — Christ's victory through death.
- Hebrews 9:11–28 — Christ's sacrificial work and bearing of sins.
- Hebrews 10:10–14 — Christ's once-for-all offering.
- 1 Peter 2:21–25 — Christ bearing sins on the tree.
- 1 John 3:8 — The Son of God and the destruction of the works of the devil.
- 1 John 4:9–10 — God's love revealed through Christ's sacrificial work.